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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/14/2016  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [SA](#)  
SUBJECT: WEBSITE REPORTS LEBANON CRISIS CAUSING SPLIT IN  
THE SAG

REF: A. A) RIYADH 6153  
[B. B\) RIYADH 5952](#)  
[C. C\) RIYADH 5839](#)  
[D. D\) RIYADH 5601](#)  
[E. E\) RIYADH 6038](#)

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Michael Gfoeller  
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (S) The Saudi website "Al-Haramayn," citing various media sources, has claimed that the SAG's reaction to the Lebanon crisis has sparked tension among senior members of the royal family. Specifically, it alleges the existence of a split between King Abdullah on the one hand, and Crown Prince Sultan, Interior Minister Prince Naif and the rest of the al-Sudayri brothers, on the other. King Abdullah's statements to date have publicly condemned Israeli attacks on Lebanon, while not taking a specific stance on Hizballah (Ref A, Ref B, Ref C, Ref D). Al-Haramayn claims that the Crown Prince and Prince Naif have taken a far different stance by supporting a fatwa issued by bin Jabreen forbidding Muslim support for Hizballah (Ref E). The website further commented that this split was deepened when Crown Prince Sultan, Prince Naif, and Prince Salman, the Governor of Riyadh, supposedly sought to court U.S. support for their position against Hizballah.

[1](#)2. (S) The website claimed that the emergence of this perceived conflict between the King and his brothers is a "prelude by Crown Prince Sultan to seize power." It also asserted that current events mirror those leading to King Faisal's assassination in 1975, when it was perceived that King Faisal had been weakened by his wavering support for pan-Arab causes in the region during this time. The website also indicated that the SAG's apparently weak position and internal divisions over this crisis reflect a moral victory by Hizballah.

[1](#)3. (S) COMMENT: Speculation on the internal politics of the royal family is a time-honored tradition in Saudi Arabia. It is not surprising that at a time of crisis in the region, local political observers should attempt to practice a Saudi variation of Kremlinology by deducing splits in the royal family from differences in statements issued by major princes. The fact that a Saudi website can publish such provocative speculation says a great deal about both the Saudi public's obsession with the Lebanon crisis and the increased degree to which the SAG tolerates free political discussion. END COMMENT.  
OBERWETTER